

The Naqshbandi Order in Seventeenth-Century Kurdistan

Martin van Bruinessen

The social and political prominence of the Naqshbandi order in 19th and 20th-century Kurdistan is well known. Several of the most important nationalist rebellions were led by Naqshbandi shaikhs. The order's political influence was at its maximum during the period between the rebellions of Shaikh `Ubaid Allah of Nehri (1880) and of Shaikh Sa`id of Palu (1925). In several parts of Kurdistan it remains in evidence until the present day. Political rivalries between Shaikh Ahmad of Barzan (the elder brother of Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the nationalist leader) and other Naqshbandi shaikhs of northern Iraq greatly affected the Kurdish movement of the 1960s, as these rivals tended to ally themselves with the Baghdad government against the Barzanis. And as recently as 1980 Shaikh `Uthman of Tawêla established a military force, consisting entirely of his followers, the *Supahî Rizgarî* ("Army of Liberation") to oppose Iran's revolutionary regime as well as the secular Kurdish forces in southern Kurdistan. Not all Kurdish Naqshbandi shaikhs are so militant, but even the most "other-worldly" among them have a great influence, political and otherwise, over large numbers of followers. In several parts of Kurdistan, following a shaikh (which in most cases means a Naqshbandi shaikh) is still considered an essential aspect of being a Muslim.¹

All Kurdish Naqshbandi shaikhs of any importance in the past century and a half trace their spiritual lineages through the highly charismatic Mawlana Khalid (Dhiya' ad-Din Khalid Baghdadi, a Kurd from the district of Shahrazur). This shaikh is known to have ordained well over thirty Kurdish *khalifas*, besides an equal number of other ethnic backgrounds. Directly or indirectly, Mawlana Khalid is responsible for the expansion of the Naqshbandi *tariqa* in such different regions as the Ottoman Empire and Indonesia.²

¹ The social and political role of the Naqshbandiyya in Kurdistan is discussed at length in: Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan*. Ph. D. diss., Utrecht 1978 [revised edition: London: Zed Books, 1992], chapters IV and V; and idem, "Vom Osmanismus zum Separatismus: Religiöse und ethnische Hintergründe der Rebellion des Scheich Saïd", pp. 109-165 in: *Islam und Politik in der Türkei*, ed. by Jochen Blaschke & Martin van Bruinessen. Berlin, Express Edition 1985 [reprinted in the present volume].

² The literature on Mawlana Khalid and his khalifas is extensive. Recent important titles include: A. Hourani, "Shaikh Khalid and the Naqshbandi order", pp. 89-103 in: *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, ed. by S. M. Stem, A. Hourani & V. Brown. Oxford 1972; Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya

The present absence of any other Naqshbandi branches among the Kurds than the Khalidiyya gives the impression that Mawlana Khalid was in fact the first to introduce this *tariqa* in Kurdistan — an incorrect impression, as I shall show below. It is undoubtedly true that Khalid's proselytising activities in the years between his return from India in 1811 and his death in 1827 were followed by a rapid expansion of the order among the Kurds, and that the political prominence it soon reached was without recent precedent. Elsewhere I have attempted to explain this expansion by drawing attention to the momentous political, economic and social changes taking place in Kurdistan during the decades immediately following Khalid's return. Political and administrative reforms, the activities of foreign missionaries among the Christian minorities, and the arrival in the region of modern imperialism, both commercial and military, made for much unrest and insecurity. As a result of the administrative reforms, traditional mechanisms for containing conflict had moreover broken down; the consequence was a definite increase in feuds, disputes, and general lawlessness. The *tariqa* shaikhs were the only remaining type of leader with sufficient authority and trustworthiness to assume an integrative function in this conflict-ridden society. They could offer spiritual (or, at least psychological) relief as well as political security, by acting as mediators and peace-makers. In the process, several of them became powerful political leaders. Under the social and political circumstances of that period, Kurdish society was in need of shaikhs; Mawlana Khalid and his *khalifas* obliged by ordaining them in great numbers.³

It is unlikely that Mawlana Khalid and his successors would have been equally successful had the circumstances been different. On the other hand, the rapid growth of the Naqshbandi order in 19th-century Kurdistan cannot be attributed to these political and social factors alone. Khalid's personality and also the nature of his particular brand of Sufism must have been equally crucial to this spectacular success. Among the *khalifas* ordained by him we find several persons who had been shaikhs of another *tariqa*, the Qadiriyya, before this ordainment, and who from then on were to teach the Naqshbandiyya only. Thus the brothers Shaikh `Abd Allah and Shaikh Ahmad of Nehri, scions of a famous lineage of Qadiri shaikhs that claimed direct descent from the great `Abd al-Qadir himself, became Khalid's *khalifas*. Another *khalifa*, Shaikh Ahmad Sardar, belonged to the equally renowned Barzinji family of

in the Ottoman lands in the early 19th century", *Die Welt des Islams* XXII, 1982 (publ. 1984), pp. 1-36; Halkawt Hakim, *Confrérie des Naqshbandis au Kurdistan au XIXe siècle*, thèse de doctorat, Paris IV, 1983.

³ This is a summary of the argument in Bruinessen 1978, pp. 284-296.

southern Kurdistan and had been, like many of his relatives, a Qadiri shaikh before.⁴ Both these families were to play prominent parts in the Kurdish national movement. The proselytisation of these shaikhs by Mawlana Khalid obviously cannot be explained by the social and political conditions: as Qadiri shaikhs they might have fulfilled their political roles equally well. The Qadiri Shaikh Mahmud Barzinji, who in the 1920s was the most powerful man of southern Kurdistan and once even proclaimed himself king of Kurdistan, is a case in point.

In the case of the said three *khalifas*, their previous Qadiri associations are still known because they belonged to particularly well-known families. Some of the other *khalifas* may also have belonged to another *tariqa* or to another branch of the Naqshbandiyya before being attracted to Khalid's reformed version of the order. I have not had the occasion to systematically investigate all biographical notices on Mawlana Khalid's *khalifas*, but I would expect that even if some of them did have previous Naqshbandi affiliations these may not have left any traces. Once such persons had received an *ijaza* (authorisation to teach the *tariqa*) from Mawlana Khalid, they were likely to stress this new link at the expense of any previous affiliations. Their *silsila* (spiritual pedigree) would from then on be traced through Mawlana Khalid, and older ideas and concepts that were too obviously at variance with Khalid's teachings were likely to be suppressed.

This is not entirely hypothetical. There are several indications that other branches of the Naqshbandiyya did in fact exist in Kurdistan in Mawlana Khalid's time. One Kurdish representative of another Naqshbandi branch was a certain Ibrahim Rushdi of Bitlis. This person wrote in 1840 a Turkish treatise (titled *Îrşadiü'r-reşidin*) in praise of his *murshid*, the well-known Naqshbandi shaikh Mehmed Nuri Şemseddin Efendi of Istanbul, who represented an earlier Naqshbandi presence in the Ottoman Empire.⁵ Systematic investigation of manuscripts originating from Kurdistan is likely to reveal the presence of more non-Khalidi Naqshbandis in Kurdistan during the first half of the 19th century. The fact that no such branches are in evidence now may be due either to a process as sketched above or to the extinction of the earlier lines. It is precisely the great success of Mawlana Khalid and his

⁴ Two other members of the Barzinji family, `Abd al-Qadir and Isma`il Kunakutri, also became *khalifas* of Mawlana Khalid (see: `Abd al-Majid Khani, *al-Hada'iq al-wardiyya fi haqa'iq ajilla' al-Naqshbandiyya*, p. 259). It is not clear, however, whether they too had been Qadiri shaikhs before. The leading branch of the family at Sulaimaniyya, on the other hand, was most hostile towards Khalid (see C. J. Edmonds. *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*. London 1957, pp. 71-78).

⁵ Hs. Or. Oct. 828, Staatsbibliothek Berlin. Mehmed Nuri Şemseddin (d. 1866) is the author of the *Miftahü'l-qulub*, one of the most widely read Naqshbandi treatises in present-day Turkey.

successors that hides from our view much of the order's history of the immediately preceding period.

Before the 19th century, too, we find occasional references to Naqshbandi shaikhs in Kurdistan, which suggests that the order has had a continuous presence there for at least three and a half centuries. Its social prominence and political influence fluctuated, reaching its peak during the century following Khalid's death. In this paper I shall deal with an earlier "peak" period of Naqshbandi activity, during the seventeenth century.

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ACCOUNT

An interesting, though incomplete, survey of the geographical distribution of the Naqshbandiyya and other *turuq* in the mid-17th century is provided by the Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi, whose *Seyahatname* offers many revealing glimpses of everyday life in his time. Evliya travelled extensively in Kurdistan, even in the parts under Iranian control, as well as in all other parts of the Ottoman Empire, and he was a frequent visitor to the *tekkes* of the various orders. The *Seyahatname* contains more or less systematic descriptions of all the towns he visited, and one of the features usually included in these descriptions is a survey of the *tekkes* and *zawiyas* of Sufi orders. Understandably, these descriptions are often tantalisingly incomplete; the amount of detail provided depended on the length of time Evliya spent in the town concerned and on who his local contacts were.

Sometimes no *tekke* is given by name at all, or there is only an estimate of their total number; elsewhere we find the names of one or more *tekke* and/or of their shaikhs. In the places where Evliya spent a reasonable amount of time he usually had occasion to note also to which *tariqa* the various *tekke* he had seen belonged and to animate this dry information with a few anecdotes on the shaikhs' miracles. Uneven and incomplete though Evliya's information is, certain geographical patterns become discernible. The accompanying map summarises this information for central and eastern Turkey, Syria, Iraq and western Iran. In this region Evliya recorded the presence of the Naqshbandiyya in six towns. It is interesting to note that all of these towns had a substantial Kurdish population. In the non-Kurdish towns of the region Evliya recorded other *turuq*, but never the Naqshbandiyya. This does not mean of course that it was entirely absent there, but it seems safe to conclude that the order was most conspicuous in Kurdistan. And the Naqshbandis of Kurdistan must have particularly

impressed Evliya, for he devotes more attention to two of them, the late Shaikh Mahmud of Diyarbekir and his ancestor Qocagha of Urumiya, than to any other shaikhs anywhere.

Shaikh Mahmud, commonly referred to as *Rumiye şeyhi*, “the shaikh from Urumiya”, or *Hazret-i ‘Aziz*, “the Saint”, was executed by Sultan Murad IV in 1639, when this ruler passed through Diyarbekir after a successful campaign against the Safavid occupiers of Baghdad. The apparent reason for this execution was the shaikh’s great political influence and rumours that he planned a Mahdist (messianist) rebellion. In an earlier campaign the shaikh had been quite useful to the sultan in mobilising popular support, but after the Persian border had been secured the sultan obviously had to turn to problems of internal security, and the popular shaikh must have been considered too great a risk.

Evliya Çelebi is not the only author who writes about Shaikh ‘Aziz Mahmud. The circumstances of the shaikh’s execution are related in some detail by the great historians of the period, Katib Çelebi, Na‘ima and Peçeви, who all mention the execution as one of the major events of the year. It is a measure of the shaikh’s renown that even in far-away Hungary, where Peçeви wrote his chronicle, the shaikh’s violent death was on peoples’ tongues and that there was talk that the sultan suffered supernatural punishment for it. “They say here”, Peçeви wrote in Temeshvar, “that at the time of his campaign to Yerevan (where Murad IV had for the first time become apprehensive of the shaikh’s influence), the sultan developed the first symptoms of gout and that on the very day of the shaikh’s death he became completely paralysed.”⁶ In Diyarbekir itself, people claimed to have witnessed a mysterious, apocalyptic phenomenon, dutifully recorded by Evliya when he visited the city 16 years later. One of the city’s curiosities was a pond with sacred fish, to which people ascribed magical properties. After the shaikh’s execution this pond suddenly turned red as if with blood.⁷ These stories make at least one thing clear: Shaikh Mahmud was an extraordinary person and was widely regarded as a great saint, whose violent death could not but disrupt the cosmic order.

The shaikh’s execution did not have the effect of diminishing the influence of the Naqshbandiyya in Diyarbekir. Mahmud was succeeded by his son Isma‘il Çelebi, who at the

⁶ *Tarih-i Peçeви* II, p. 462 (first printed edition, Istanbul 1281-83 H).

⁷ *Seyahatname* IV, Ms. Bağdat Köşkü 305, Topkapı Library, fol. 202a. This is the archetype manuscript (Evliya’s autograph or, as has been suggested, the manuscript of a scribe to whom Evliya dictated his text). Much of Evliya’s reputation as unreliable is due to the rather careless printed edition of his work; the archetype manuscript shows that he is, if read with proper care, a quite reliable source.

time of Evliya's visit wielded unrivalled influence, both among the urban elite and among the common people.

LIFE AND INFLUENCE OF SHAIKH MAHMUD

The few existing biographical notices of Shaikh Mahmud⁸ are uninformative on his background and early life. As his common appellation of *Rumiye şeyhi* indicates, he hailed from Urumiya in western Adharbaijan, where his father or grandfather Ahmad, better known as Qocagha or Qoc Baba, and other relatives had been influential Naqshbandi shaikhs with a large following among the Sunni Turks and Kurds of the region. He left this town out of fear or hatred of the Qizilbash; it is likely that this was when, after a quarter century of Ottoman rule, Urumiya was reoccupied by the Safavids, some time in the years 1605-07. As the leading shaikh of the Naqshbandi *tariqa*, reputed to be the most staunchly Sunni order, and the one least acceptable to the Qizilbash, he may have feared for his life. Ambition may however have been an additional reason for his move to Diyarbekir. This city was then a major administrative and military centre, with many rich merchants engaged in long-distance trade. Good roads connected it with all parts of Kurdistan as well as with Adharbaijan, Syria and Anatolia, and annually many pilgrims from the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, northern Iran and even Central Asia passed it on their way to Mecca.⁹ This made it into a prime strategic location for a shaikh intent on spreading his influence throughout the Kurdish districts and beyond.

Mahmud was apparently accompanied by a brother when he came to the Ottoman lands but it is not clear whether the brother also established himself at Diyarbekir or elsewhere, nor what his name was. The brother's sons were later to perpetuate the family line as well as the *tariqa*, but the brother himself was completely overshadowed by Shaikh or, as he was increasingly called, 'Aziz ("Saint") Mahmud. Both brothers had the initial benefit of their family's fame; Mahmud moreover showed himself even in his childhood extremely gifted. Even before his emigration he was, according to 'Ushaqizade, proficient in many branches of learning and had attained profound mystical illumination. From Diyarbekir, his reputation

⁸ Besides Evliya's account and those in the chronicles by Katib Çelebi, Na'ima and Peçeви, there are notices in 'Ushaqizade's *Dhayl-i Shaqa'iq* ('*Ushaqizade's Lebensbeschreibungen berühmter Gelehrten und Göttesmänner des osmanischen Reiches im 17. Jahrhundert*, hg. von H. J. Kissling. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1965, fol. 25b-26a) and in: 'Ali Emiri *Tedhkire-yi shu'ara-yi Amid*. Istanbul, 1327 11, p. 20-21.

⁹ M. van Bruinessen and H. Boeschoten, *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbekir*, Leiden, Brill, 1988.

spread rapidly and widely. Within decades he was said to have more than forty thousand murid. His influence reached all over Kurdistan and even far into Iran. His *tekke* was visited by generals and provincial governors paying their respects; big merchants from Tabriz, Yerevan, Erzerum, Mosul, Ruha (Urfa) and Van came to kiss the hem of his robe.¹⁰ In the city of Diyarbekir and the surrounding districts, “the entire population” were his murid, and he was so highly thought of people swore oaths by his name: *`Aziz başıyçin*, “by the head of the Saint.”¹¹ Evliya’s account presents the shaikh as a respected aristocrat, patronised by the highest social circles, to which his more sophisticated mystical teachings appealed, but at the same time a popular leader commanding the unconditional obedience of forty thousand fearless and violent followers from among the lowest strata of society.

All these followers’ loyalties were to Shaikh Mahmud directly; he does not seem to have built an important network of khalifas that might have brought more structure and organisation to the following. Apart from the original *tekke* at Urumiya, only the one at Van is associated with this Naqshbandi branch by Evliya. The only khalifa mentioned in the chronicles hailed from Van too. Other sources mention two khalifas in Erzerum and one who later moved to Bursa.¹² Finally, the shaikh ordained one of his nephews as a khalifa. His son and successor Isma`il is not known at all to have appointed a khalifa. This failure or unwillingness of the shaikhs to institutionalise their charisma must have been the reason why this branch of the order rapidly dissipated and well nigh disappeared when there was no longer a powerful shaikh in the centre. In Mahmud’s lifetime however it did not impede his ability to mobilise followers from wide afield, and it may even have been an asset.

The political and economic conditions of the time must have contributed to the shaikh’s political influence. The period of the great Jalali rebellions was over, but most of the Empire’s eastern provinces were still in turmoil. The central government’s control of the region, or in fact of its own administrative apparatus there, was very incomplete and at times non-existent. From 1623 on, the Ottoman Empire was at war again with the Safavids, and Sultan Murad IV himself led two great Persian campaigns: in 1635 to Yerevan and in 1638-39 to Baghdad, both of which he wrested back from Safavid control. These campaigns constituted a heavy burden,

¹⁰ Mustafa Na`ima, *Ravzatü’l-Hüseyn fi hulaset ahbari’l-hafikayn* vol. III, pp. 385, 389 (references to the third printed edition, Istanbul 1281-3 H).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

¹² Na`ima mentions the khalifa Qara `Abd Allah from Van in a context suggesting that he was the shaikh’s most trusted man in Diyarbekir (*ibid.* p. 386) ; a Turkish *silsilename* (see note 32 below) mentions Shaikh Hajji Muhammad Efendi and Shaikh Qaraman as khalifas in Erzerum, and Beligh mentions a shaikh Ibrahim who came

especially on the peasantry of the eastern provinces. Extra taxes had to be raised in order to feed the enormous armies. The great amounts of wheat and barley requisitioned were on top of the ordinary, officially assessed annual taxes and everything else that the local authorities squeezed out of the peasantry. The distress caused by the war defies description. In such a situation of political and economic insecurity or worse, Shaikh Mahmud's influence was likely to increase, as did that of the Naqshbandi shaikhs in 19th-century Kurdistan. The war with Iran must have reinforced the Kurds' awareness of their Sunni identity, nicely embodied by the shaikh who was moreover a refugee from Iranian territory. The social insecurities led moreover many people to flock to his *tekke* to seek redress from injustice, the representation of complaints to authorities, mediation in conflicts. All the shaikh's visitors were abundantly fed as long as they stayed at his *tekke*, and this fact was no doubt instrumental in establishing the hard core of the shaikh's obedient, fearless and violent band of followers.

Sultan Murad IV first met the shaikh on the occasion of the Yerevan campaign, in which the latter apparently took part. Shaikh Mahmud's profound knowledge of regional affairs must have been useful to the sultan, as was the further legitimisation the shaikh's presence lent to the campaign. The great respect that was everywhere shown to the shaikh may have made the sultan apprehensive about the shaikh's ambitions even then. According to Na`ima, the shaikh even received an envoy from the beleaguered city in his tent and wrote letters that were instrumental in the city's surrender. The sultan hid his annoyance and made a show of gratitude, showering honours upon the shaikh. Peçevi explicitly points to another root of conflict: "...Because most of the people of Kurdistan are the devout followers of the shaikh's father, his brother or himself, they came in large numbers to the imperial army camp, asking for the shaikh's tent and *bearing complaints to the effect that their lands were barren*, which caused the sultan's anger."¹³

When three years later the sultan set out on his next eastern campaign, to Baghdad, Shaikh Mahmud led a deputation of the notables of Diyarbekir welcoming the sultan at Aleppo and presenting him with precious gifts. The shaikh also asked the sultan for a reduction of the oppressively high extra taxes that were being levied for this campaign. Apparently this request was granted, perhaps because the shaikh had pleased the sultan by predicting great victories.¹⁴

to Bursa after `Aziz Mahmud's execution.

¹³ Peçevi, op.cit., vol. II, p. 462. Emphasis added by the present author.

¹⁴ Na`ima III, pp. 386-7; Evliya, IV, fol. 209a. Evliya writes that Murad granted the shaikh's request, and this

Shaikh Mahmud had thus on two occasions made the sultan aware of the economic grievances of his region's people; for reasons of political stability, probably, the sultan had seen himself obliged to give in to the shaikh's request. He succeeded however in conquering Baghdad and followed this up by concluding a treaty with the Safavids that settled the border question. This made him less dependent on the goodwill of the shaikh. Passing through Diyarbekir on the way back, he had the shaikh executed without much further ado — a necessary final act in his settlement of the Eastern Question.

The historians who relate the shaikh's execution all try to adduce further reasons for it. The one reason given by all is that certain unnamed enemies of the shaikh's repeatedly suggested to the sultan that the shaikh was preparing a rebellion, and was likely to set himself up as the *Mahdi*. Did all those economic complaints not reek of rebellion? Would not shaikh's popularity with these fearless and violent paupers, obedient and ready to die for him, necessarily turn him into a dangerous warlord? People who had the sultan's ear reminded him that there had been earlier cases of Sufis not contenting themselves with *irshad* but striving after *saltanat*.

The memory of the Mahdist rebellion of the "Shaikh of Sakarya" (*Saqarya şeyhi*), that had alarmed the sultan when he was first setting out on the Baghdad campaign, was still fresh. That "shaikh" was in fact only a dervish, who had failed to succeed to the position of his master when the latter died, and who then declared himself the *Mahdi*, a claim that apparently was accepted by at least some of the other dervishes. The *Mahdi* had his rival, the appointed successor to his shaikh, killed and sent a band of his followers to Eskişehir to settle his doctrinal disagreements with the local `ulama by force of arms. By the time the sultan sent troops from the army that was assembling to march to Baghdad, the *Mahdi* had so much strengthened himself that these troops were routed. It was by stratagem, not by force of arms, that the *Mahdi* was at last captured, to meet a violent and cruel death.¹⁵ If even such an insignificant dervish was capable of creating such great problems, how much more dangerous would not a revolt by a respected and famous man like Mahmud be?

seems to be confirmed by the fact that the registers of the *`avarız* taxes levied for this campaign mention two different figures for the province of Diyarbekir (reproduced in: Lütü Güçer, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Hububat Meselesi ve Hububattan Alınan Vergiler*, İstanbul 1964). The higher figure may represent the taxes originally demanded, the lower one those actually delivered, corresponding with the reduction requested by the shaikh.

¹⁵ On the mahdist rebellion of "Saqarya şeyhi": Katib Çelebi, *Fezleke-i Tarih* II, pp. 295-7; Na`ima III, pp. 335-8.

After the shaikh had been strangled, Na`ima tells, the sultan sent his men to Mahmud's palatial residence in order to look for the arms and stores of grain that should bear witness to the shaikh's intentions. None could be found, and the ruler immediately repented, aware that he had been deceived by the shaikh's enemies.¹⁶ Whatever may really have happened, this version of the events allowed people to bestow unreserved praise upon Shaikh Mahmud without seeming disloyal to the late sultan (who had died, to quote Evliya once more, with the words "Aaah, Shaikh of Urumiyai " on his lips).

ALCHEMY AND OTHER PECULIARITIES

Both Na`ima and Evliya also mention the shaikh's experiments in alchemy in connection with his execution. Their stories differ, but have enough of possible interest in common to summarise them here. The real alchemist was not the shaikh himself, but a woman who had taken refuge under his protection. She was a daughter of the Druze emir Fakhr ad-Din Ma`anoğlu, who had been executed a few years before (in 1635) because of his repeated attempts to make himself independent of the Ottomans. Apart from being a powerful and clever local potentate, Fakhr ad-Din was well versed in the exoteric and esoteric sciences and had some reputation as an occultist.¹⁷ When the family was taken prisoner this daughter alone, disguised as a man, had managed to escape and in making her way to Diyarbekir. There she had won the shaikh's favours by telling that she shared her father's knowledge of alchemy and by performing an impressive transmutation for him, changing copper into silver and finally into gold.

In the version narrated by Na`ima (who himself indicated his reservations on the credibility of the story), the shaikh presented Sultan Murad with a sample of this gold, and offered to fill the state treasury with this product (as a substitute for taxes?). The sultan, on his way to Baghdad, and always having a use for more gold, left a considerable sum of money in Diyarbekir in order to buy the necessary ingredients and pay the alchemist for her work, and he appointed one of his officers to keep a close watch over her. Fakhr ad-Din's daughter

¹⁶ Na`ima III, p. 391.

¹⁷ The Frenchman D'Arvieux, who had met Fakhr ad-Din, wrote admiringly that "...il savait plusieurs langues, s'appliquait à la chimie et à l'astronomie; il était extrêmement curieux, aimait la peinture, la poésie et la musique et donnait des appointements considérables aux savants qu'il faisait venir d'Europe pour travailler sous ses yeux..." (*Mémoires* I, p. 364). On Fakhr ad-Din Ma`anoğlu, see: M. Chebli, *Fakhreddine II Maan, Prince du Liban (1572-1635)*, Beyrouth, 1946; Adel Ismail, *Histoire du Liban*, II, Paris, 1955.

appeared to spend much more time in the company of the town's music-loving young men than in her laboratory, and when the officer had finally set her to work she produced only an inferior yellowish metal. The officer duly reported to Baghdad, and when the sultan returned to Diyarbekir he had the woman immediately strangled. The shaikh, considered her accomplice, shared her fate.¹⁸ In Evliya's account, the sultan had heard rumours about the shaikh's making gold in order to finance a rebellion. When conversing with the shaikh, he then broached the subject of alchemy, and professed curiosity and scepticism. The shaikh replied that there was certainly truth in this science, but that its aim was not, as the vulgar thought, to acquire earthly riches. "True mystics by this science make little grains of gold; when they eat these they can go without ordinary food for a long time." The sultan asked for a demonstration, and was introduced to Fakhr ad-Din's daughter, who in his presence performed a spectacular transmutation. Sultan Murad ate three little golden pills that the shaikh made for him, and which relieved him of hunger for a full day and night. Realising afterwards that a part of the rumour had proven true (the shaikh could make gold), he thought there might be some truth in the other accusations as well, and had the shaikh killed.¹⁹

Distorted though these stories may be, they do give us one of the very few indications of the actual beliefs and practices taught by Shaikh Mahmud. It is clear that alchemy was, to the shaikh, not one of the physical sciences, but a branch, or an aspect, of esoteric teachings. The transformation sought for was to lessen man's dependence on the material world (on food, in Evliya's story). The origin of stories about the shaikh's making gold may have been occasional references to the alchemical process in sermons to his inner circle of *murid*. Did the shaikh possibly teach the metaphysics of Ibn al-`Arabi, in which this alchemy of the soul has an important place?²⁰ It is impossible to prove, but not unlikely. As Evliya observes elsewhere in the *Seyahatname*, the works of Ibn al-`Arabi had in the preceding century been condemned as un-Islamic by the great *shaikh al-islam*, Ebü'ssu`ud, but they continued to be read and studied. The long list of precious books in the library of the Kurdish ruler of Bitlis, which was confiscated in Evliya's presence, is headed by the *Futuhât* and the *Fusus* along

¹⁸ Na`ima III, p. 387-9. Na`ima copied this story from an earlier chronicler, Şarihü'l-Menarzade, and indicates his own scepticism: he finds the behaviour of the alchemist and the shaikh in it inconceivable.

¹⁹ Evliya IV, fol. 209a. Full text and translation in Bruinessen and Boeschoten, *op. cit.* [The relevant parts of the translation are appended to the preceding chapter in this collection, "Religious life in Diyarbekir".] Evliya's source was his uncle and patron, Melek Ahmed Pasha who, as the sultan's sword-bearer, was present at that time, and who greatly admired the shaikh.

²⁰ The relevant sections of the *Futuhât* were translated by Stephane Ruspoli into French as: Mohyiddin ibn `Arabi, *L'Alchimie du bonheur parfait*, Paris, 1981.

with several commentaries on these works.²¹ There was apparently a serious interest in these works among the educated Kurds.

The influence of Ibn al-`Arabi's metaphysics also appears to be hinted at by Evliya's frequent use of the word *tevhîd* ("the affirmation of God's Oneness"), and his word-plays upon its various shades of meaning. As a technical term it refers first of all to the recitation of the *dhikr nafy wa ithbat*, i. e. of the formula *la ilaha illa'llah*. This is obviously meant when Evliya says that the shaikh's disciples engage in "*tevhîd ü tezkîr*". Secondly, the term may be used as a synonym of *`aqida* or *usul al-din*, knowledge of the basic tenets of Islam. The shaikh's *medrese* taught two subjects, *tasawwuf* and *tawhid*, and the second of these may simply have been this basic knowledge of orthodox theology.²² The term has, however, also been used to refer to Ibn al-`Arabi's metaphysics of the Unity of Being, *wahdat al-wujud*.²³ Evliya's narrative suggests that the shaikh taught *tevhid* in this last sense. He speaks of the mystical exercises in the shaikh's *zawiya* as *tevhîd-i Fîsâghûrâs-i Tevhîdî*. Pythagoras was, in Ottoman literature, not only associated with the invention of music but also with the various occult sciences. Evliya mentions him several times in his work, and always with the epithet *Tevhîdî*, which can hardly mean anything but "Monist" or "Pantheist". I am inclined to interpret Evliya's oblique observations as implying that the shaikh's Sufism was of the monist kind associated with the great Muhyi ad-Din.

There was one other peculiarity to this branch of the Naqshbandiyya, also explicitly mentioned by `Ushaqizade and Na`ima: its *dhikr* was not silent as usual, but *jahri*, i.e. recited aloud. Evliya speaks several times of the extraordinary, enchanting beauty of these recitations, which "induce in the listener states of intoxication, rapture and ecstasy". Because most people in Diyarbekir belonged to this or the Gülşeni order (the other locally influential *tariqa*), "the blissful ecstasies of mystical union never left them".²⁴

Evliya nowhere says so explicitly, but his account conveys the impression that music was used in these ceremonies. This was extremely uncommon among Naqshbandl, but it was standard practice with the Gülşeniye, whose *dhikrs* Evliya mentioned in one breath with those

²¹ Evliya IV, fol. 275b.

²² Ibid., 201b.

²³ H. L. Şuşud, *İslam tasavvufunda Hâcegân hânedânı*. Istanbul, 1958, p. 166; Tahsin Yazıcı, "Tevhid", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*.

²⁴ "...tevhîd ü tezkîr-i Hvâcegân istimâ` eden yârân u ihvâmı mest ü hayrân u vâlih ü sergerdân eder" (Evliya IV, fol. 201a); "... ehâlî-yi Diyârbekir cümle tarîq-i Hvâcegândan ve tarîq-i Gülşenîden olmaq ile zevq ü şevq-i tevhîd vecdinden hâlî degillerdir" (ibid., fol. 208a).

in `Aziz Mahmud's *zawiya*. The first successors of the shaikh, his son Isma`il and grandson Ahmad, acquired more than local renown as musicians and composers, which makes it even more likely that music was also used as a supporting element in the mystical exercises.

Thus, if my interpretations are correct, the branch of the Naqshbandiyya represented by Shaikh `Aziz Mahmud and his immediate successors (later known as the Urmawi branch, after their original Urumiya) adhered to the metaphysical system of *wahdat al-wujud* and encouraged strong emotions and ecstasy through loud *dhikr* and the use of poetry and music.

In these respects the Urmawi branch appears to deviate from the austerity commonly associated with the Naqshbandiyya. The order's present reputation however has been much influenced by the reforms introduced by the *mujaddid*, Ahmad Sirhindi, and by Mawlana Khalid. About the actual pre-Mujaddidi practices common in the order much less is known. In Shaikh Mahmud's time, Mujaddidi influence had not yet reached the region; he was a contemporary of Sirhindi.

The first Naqshbandis in the Ottoman Empire, a century and a half earlier, definitely embraced *wahdat al-wujud*, which was then a perfectly acceptable metaphysical system.²⁵ In the course of the Empire's confrontation with the Safavids and with heterodox mystico-political movements in its own territories, however, the Naqshbandiyya came to assume the role of the upholder of strict Sunni orthodoxy.²⁶ The stem *shaikh al-islam* Ebü'ssu`ud (1545-1574) not only issued fatwas condemning the Qizilbash and other Shii extremists, but also declared Ibn al-`Arabi's teachings heretical and condemned all forms of ecstatic mysticism. Music was completely banned in his day.

All these bans were often respected in the breach only. The forbidden practices were known to persist in other orders, and one can only guess to what extent the Naqshbandiyya in places like Istanbul and Bursa (its major centres in Evliya's time) actually conformed to the austere rules prescribed. The Urmawi branch at Diyarbekir clearly did not. Evliya had an acquaintance with the Naqshbandis in the said major cities as well as those in Mecca and Cairo, but he presents the Urmawi branch as something *sui generis*. Of all the *dhikr* meetings he attended in the course of his travels, none seem to have impressed him so much as those in Diyarbekir's Urmawi tekke.²⁷

²⁵ Kasim Kufralı, "Molla İlâhi ve kendisinden sonraki Nakşibendiye muhiti", İ.Ü. Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi, III (1949), pp. 129-132.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-138.

²⁷ The *Seyahatname* contains many descriptions of dervish convents, but only the Gülşeni rituals in the Cairo *tekke* of that order receive some of the same admiring attention as given to the Urmawi Naqshbandi tekke.

THE SPIRITUAL GENEALOGY OF THE URMAWI BRANCH

Evliya distinguishes this Urmawi branch also by name from the other Naqshbandis. He usually refers to it as the *tariq-i Khwâjagân*, or the *tariq-i Khwâjagân-i Naqshbandî*, whereas the other branches are simply referred to as *Naqshbandi*. Besides the convent in Diyarbekir, Evliya recorded *tekke* of this branch in Van and in Urumiya and environs. In the latter town and region, several of Shaikh Mahmud's ancestors had taught this *tariqa*; Evliya mentions two of them, Qocagha Sultan and Shuri (or Shawri) Sultan. The second of these remains obscure, but on the occasion of his visit to Urumiya, also in 1655, Evliya has much to tell about Qocagha, whose shrine he found to be well-maintained and openly in use as a Naqshbandi *tekke*, in spite of Safavid rule. The majority of Urumiya's population were, he claims, Sunni Muslims and refused to perform their prayers in the mosques behind the official Shi'i imams. There were no great scholars among them, but many were devout mystics, all of them followers of the *tariq-i Khwajagan* taught by Qocagha Sultan.

Evliya also narrates a curious miracle story involving this saint: some time after Qocagha's death his disciples ran into trouble with Kuncul Toqmaq `Ali Khan, who had become the local governor under Shah Muhammad Khudabanda. Apparently in order to break the local population's belief in Qocagha's *karamat*, the khan had the shaikh's body unearthed. Seeing that the body showed no sign of decay although it had been buried for several years (the first miracle), he had then a huge pyre erected on which it was placed. During the cremation frightening voices were heard, and when the fire was finally consumed the shaikh's ashes appeared to have assumed the shape of a young child! The khan's men were overcome with fear and cursed their master. Dervishes took the shaikh's remains, wrapped them in a shroud and for the second time performed his funeral prayers and buried him. The place of the cremation was within days miraculously covered with herbs and flowers. When Shah Muhammad heard of these events he rode to Urumiya and personally saw to the punishment of Toqmaq Khan. The impious khan and his sons, the local qadi and the mufti who had issued a fatwa permitting the exhumation and cremation, together with all of the khan's retainers who had lent a hand, were thrown into a huge bonfire that the Shah had lit. Compensating for

his khan's behaviour, he had then the shaikh's shrine repaired and embellished it so much with parks and gardens that Evliya compared it with Paradise.²⁸

All this had supposedly happened some seventy years before Evliya's visit, and the story contains no useful historical clues. Neither the *`Alam-ara-yi `Abbasi*, nor the local chronicles summarised by Nikitine, Dihqan and Mashkur mention any event on which this story may have been based.²⁹ It was not Muhammad Khudabanda, but his brother and predecessor Shah Isma'il II who is reputed to have been more friendly towards the Sunnis. No governor of Urumiya is known whose name resembles that of Kuncul Toqmaq `Ali Khan; the only more or less contemporary khan known by the same sobriquet of Toqmaq was Muhammad Khan Ustajlu, the Qizilbash commander in the Caucasian province of Chuqur-i Sa'd, who fought the Ottomans when they attacked and invaded the area in 1578. Evliya may have confounded the anti-Sunni khan of Urumiya with this well-known opponent of the Ottoman invasion.

The story suggests — but even this much remains uncertain — that Qocagha died before or during Muhammad Khudabanda's reign (1577-88). He may therefore have been Shaikh Mahmud's grandfather rather than his father. `Ushaqizade gives, in his biographical entry on Mahmud, the father's proper name as Sayyid Ahmad Efendi, while in the genealogy of another descendent he occurs as Sayyid Muhammad (see note 39). Nowhere do we find further confirmation on his origins or the identity of his teachers. The most detailed source is again Evliya, who writes that Qocagha was born in a small town to the southwest of Urumiya, where many members of the family lay buried,³⁰ and that he had lived and taught in the city of Urumiya itself, where he built a mosque and a large mansion (*saray*). About his spiritual pedigree one can only speculate.

There are several possibilities. According to the Persian *Silsilanama-yi Khwajagan*, Khwaja `Ubaid Allah Ahrar had a number of khalifas in Adharbaidjan. None of them is known to have left behind a lasting presence of the order,³¹ but too little is known to exclude

²⁸ Evliya IV, fol. 296a-b.

²⁹ Iskandar Beg Turkman, *`Alam-ara-yi `Abbasi*, ed. by Iraj Afshar. Tehran 1350; B. Nikitine, "Les Afšars d'Urumieh", *Journal Asiatique*, 214, 1929, pp. 67-123 ; `A. Dihqan, *Sarzamin-i Zardasht: Rida'iyya*. Tehran, 1348 H.; M.J. Mashkur, *Nazari bi tarikh-i Adharbajian*. Tehran, 1349 H.

³⁰ Evliya passed this town, in the territory of the Dumbuli tribe, and says it was popularly called *Kend-i Qocagha Baba*. Its real name remains obscure, and the indication of its location is very imprecise (Evliya IV, fol. 298a).

³¹ One of them, `Ali Kurdi Maqtul of Qazwin, had six important disciples, all of which died without spiritual issue. The other khalifas of Khwaja Ahrar in western Iran were: Siraj ad-Din b. Khwaja `Umar (died in Tabriz, 891 H), Khwaja Muhammad Amin Bulghari (died in Tabriz between 897 and 902), and Sayyid Nur ad-Din `Abd al-Wahhab (died in 927, after rallying to the Safavid cause). None of them is known to have appointed a khalifa

the possibility that Qocagha belonged to a line issuing from one of these shaikhs, of which the author of the *Silsilanama* was not aware. A more likely connection, however, is suggested by an Adharbaijani *silsila* listed in a Turkish version of the *Silsilanama*, to which Hamid Algar drew my attention. It is a line of affiliation that bypasses Khwaja Ahrar and that brings us close to Qocagha in time and space.³²

Baha' ad-Din Naqshband

`Ala ad-Din `Attar

Nizam ad-Din Khamush

Sa'd ad-Din Kashghari

`Ala ad-Din Maktabdar

Sun` Allah Kuzakunani

born in Kuzakunan west of Tabriz;

died in the village of Baba Murid near Tabriz in 929/1522-3

`Alijan Badamyari

born in Badamyar, a village southwest of Tabriz;

died near Aleppo in 967/1559-60

Ilyas Badamyari

fled from the Safavids to Urumiya, where he took up residence and gained adherents among the Kurds; date of death not mentioned

Muhammad Badamyari

(Hamid Algar, personal communication). Cf. Hamid Algar, "The Naqshbandi order: a preliminary survey of its history and significance", *Studia Islamica*, 44, 1976, pp. 123-152, esp.139-140.

³² In the Turkish translation (and continuation) of the *Silsilanama-yi Khwajagan-i Naqshband*, Ms. Hüsrev Pasha no. 408, Süleymaniye, Istanbul. I am obliged to Hamid Algar for sending me this transcription of the relevant part of this text.

accompanied Ilyas to Urumiya and succeeded to his position there

Shaikh Muhammad Badamyari thus flourished in Urumiya around the same period as our Qocagha. He may therefore have been his *murshid*; it is even conceivable that the two were identical.³³ The connection is by no means certain: the existence of two independent lines of the Naqshbandiyya in the same town may seem unlikely, but in Urumiya this appears to have been the case. Evliya mentions the shrine of another, apparently unconnected, Naqshbandi shaikh there, Boza Wali Sultan (or Boz Ulu Sultan).

There may be another indication of the spiritual connections of the Urmawi branch in the name by which Evliya refers to it, *tariq-i Khwajagan* (Boza Wali Sultan is simply called a Naqshbandi). He uses the same name in two other instances, both with strong Central Asian connections. In Cizre he visited a *tekke* located in the shrine of Shaikh Muhammad al-Ghaws (probably a misspelling for al-Ghawth), who had been “a great Sufi of the *tariq-i Khwajagan-i Naqshband*, though not a *qutb*” (*qutbiyete qadem basmamış ulu sultan*). The residents of the *tekke* were not local people but mainly “Indians” and Central Asians (*Hindi ve Özbeki ve Çaghatayi ve Qomuq qavmi*).³⁴ The term *Khwajagan* can in this case not refer to a connection with the Urmawi branch, which drew its followers from among Kurds and Turks. It appears to carry a Central Asian connotation. The same is true of the other *tekke* of the *tariq-i Khwajagan*, in Cairo: all of its residents were Uzbeks.³⁵ It makes of course sense to reserve the name *Khwajagan* for Naqshbandi from the region where the masters known by this title had lived and taught. Perceived differences in ideas and practices between these Central Asian and the contemporary western Naqshbandi may have led Evliya to apply the term to a distinctive sub-group within the Naqshbandiyya. If my guess is correct, this would suggest that Qocagha’s affiliation was not with any of the Adharbaijani *silsilas* above, but directly with some Central Asian teacher.

THE URMAWI LINE AFTER SHAIKH `AZIZ MAHMUD

³³ The names Ahmad and Muhammad are sometimes almost interchangeable. I have not been able to find a place named Badamyar in the existing gazetteers, and given the imprecision of Evliya’s notes on “Kend-i Qocagha Baba” it is not impossible that the two villages are identical.

³⁴ Evliya, IV, fol. 386a, 387b. This shrine still exists and is well-maintained, but locally nothing is known about this Shaikh Muhammad (personal communication, Shaikh Nurullah Varol of Cizre).

³⁵ *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi* X, p. 242 (printed edition, Istanbul 1938).

Shaikh `Aziz Mahmud was, according to most accounts, succeeded by his son Isma`il Çelebi. Evliya, who met the successor in 1655, does not mention his proper name but makes clear that his standing was then as high as his father's had been. As might be expected, Isma`il had received a thorough education in the Islamic sciences from the `ulama of Diyarbekir, but he was also an accomplished poet, composer and musician, and it is especially in the latter capacities that posterity remembered him.³⁶ His son Ahmad inherited not only the shaikhly mantle but his father's musical genius as well, and became one of the best composers of Sultan Mehmed IV's time.³⁷

Ahmad was the last shaikh of his line whom we find mentioned as active in Kurdistan. The line in Diyarbekir was either extinguished completely, or it went under in insignificance. The Urmawi line persisted for some time in Bursa, however. It had first been introduced there by a certain Ibrahim Efendi, one of Shaikh Mahmud's khalifas. Ibrahim is said to have travelled westwards after his *murshids* execution; he died in Bursa in 1650.³⁸

It was probably even before his death that another Urmawi also settled in Bursa: Shaikh `Aziz Mahmud's nephew "Açıqbash" Mahmud. This person was born in Diyarbekir; his father may have been the brother of Shaikh `Aziz Mahmud — the historian Peçevi speaks of a brother of the shaikh but does not mention a name.³⁹ As a young man, Açıqbash embarked upon a secular career in government service, and he reached the high position of *voyvoda* (tax-collecting deputy governor) of Mardin. He won moreover some fame as a poet, under the pen-name of Resmi. After a mystical experience he decided to forsake worldly affairs. He studied Sufism under his uncle's guidance and ultimately became one of his khalifas. After Shaikh `Aziz Mahmud's execution he too left Diyarbekir, travelling to Cairo first and from there to Istanbul, where he soon had a rapidly growing circle of disciples around him. After an incident in which he aroused the ill-will of the powerful grand vizier (Köprülü Mehmed) and the *shaikh al-islam* of the time, he moved to Bursa, where he lived until his death in 1666. Açıqbash Mahmud compiled a sequel to `Ali Hamadani's well-known collection of

³⁶ Biographies of Isma`il in: `Ali Emiri, *op. cit.*, p. 20-21; Şevket Beysanoğlu, *Diyarbakırlı Fikir ve Sanat Adamları*, cilt I, İstanbul, 1957, p. 145. Na`ima (*op. cit.*, p. 386) relates that Shaikh Mahmud appointed Isma`il as his successor after a dream predicting his death.

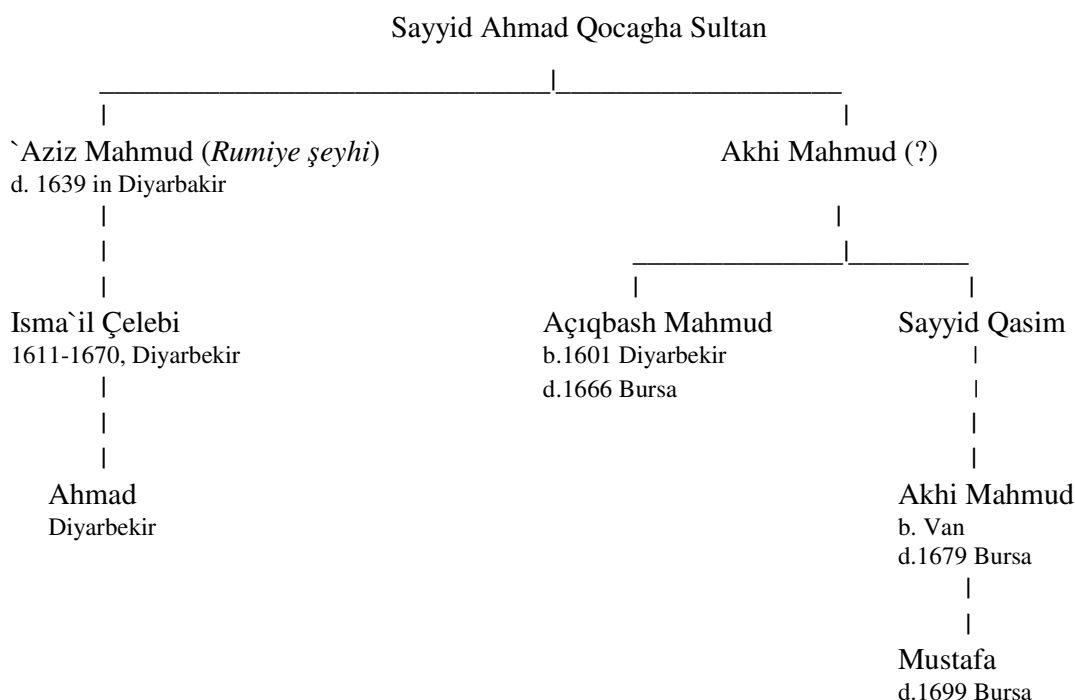
³⁷ Beysanoğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 167-8.

³⁸ Isma`il Beligh, *Güldeste-i Riyaz-i `Irfan*, İstanbul, n.d., p. 169-170.

³⁹ Beligh (*op. cit.*, p. 154) gives Açıqbash' full name as *as-Sayyid Shaikh Mahmud Efendi b. as-Sayyid Akhi Mahmud Efendi b. as-Sayyid Muhammad b. as-Sayyid Muhammad*. Akhi Mahmud was not the proper name of his father but should be read as "brother of Mahmud".

prayer litanies, the *Awrad-i Fathiyya*, and translated a Persian commentary on the same work.⁴⁰ According to Beligh, he was succeeded in Bursa by his nephew, Akhi Mahmud, about whom nothing remarkable is known, and the latter was succeeded in turn by his son Mustafa, after whom the family line disappears from sight.⁴¹

The genealogical and spiritual links of the most prominent representatives of the Urmawi branch of the Naqshbandiyya are summed up in the following graph:



A Turkish *silsilanama* that contains some stray notes on the Urmawi branch mentions another line of Nashbandis affiliated with this branch in Erzerum, where Shaikh `Aziz Mahmud had appointed two khalifas, Shaikh Haji Muhammad and Shaikh Qaraman. The latter initiated his son, Abu Bakr Efendi, and the former appointed three nephews as his

⁴⁰ Biographies of Açıqbash Mahmud: Beligh, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-159; Emiri, *op. cit.*, p. 381; Beysanoğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 145-147; Brusalı Mehmed Tahir, *`Osmanlı mü'ellifleri*, I, p. 14.

⁴¹ Beligh, *op. cit.*, p. 159-160; cf. Kufralı, *art. cit.*, p. 148-151. The Turkish translator of the *Silsilanama-yi Khwajagan* (see note 32) added some notes on the Urmawi branch that are at variance with the information found elsewhere. According to him, Shaikh Mahmud was succeeded in Diyarbakir by, consecutively, his son Mustafa, his nephew (sic!) Isma`il, and another son, Ibrahim. This appears to be a highly distorted account, apparently based on hearsay.

khalifas, Muhammad Amin Efendi, Saifi Çelebi and Sayyid `Umar.⁴² This line then was apparently also extinguished, for in the early 18th century there appear not to have been Naqshbandis in Erzerum, as one gathers from Ibrahim Haqqı Erzerumi's account of his father's quest for a master, which will be discussed below.

OTHER NAQSHBANDIS IN KURDISTAN

Three of the six Naqshbandi *tekkes* in Kurdistan mentioned by Evliya belonged to the Urmawi branch. The fourth *tekke*, in Cizre, was been mentioned above; it lodged Central Asians and "Indians" — a designation that includes Afghans. The remaining two *tekkes* were in Malatya and Bitlis. Evliya calls them simply "Naqshbandi" without adding further information on their affiliations. We may surmise that these lodges attracted local people, and that they belonged to another line of affiliation than the Urmawi. Besides these, there were may well have been other small, relatively isolated groups of Naqshbandis in Kurdistan, of unclear affiliation. The origins of these groups may have been due to temporary visits of travelling Sufis from elsewhere. In the early 16th century, for instance, Shaikh Sun` Allah Kuzakunani and his son Abu Sa`id spent several years in Kurdistan. Sun` Allah (whose name also occurs in the Adharbaijani *silsila* above) was born in Adharbaijan, had travelled east to be initiated into the Naqshbandiyya by either Khwaja Ahrar or `Ala' ad-Din Maktabdar and returned to Tabriz, where he taught the *tariqa* for some years. Shah Isma`il's conquest of the city caused him to take refuge in Bitlis, but later he returned to Adharbaijan, and his son Abu Sa`id was born there in 1514.⁴³ The son later fled to Turkey on the occasion of Sultan Suleyman's campaign to Adharbaijan (1548), settling in Diyarbekir first, and thence moving to Aleppo and Istanbul.⁴⁴ These two shaikhs are not known to have appointed any khalifas during their stay in Kurdistan, but it appears likely that at least they had Kurdish disciples.

Itinerant Central Asian Naqshbandis may have had a greater impact in Kurdistan. On their way to Mecca, many Central Asians passed through Kurdistan and some of them spent a

⁴² *Silsilanama*, as communicated to me by Hamid Algar. Given the distortion in the observations on Diyarbekir, this information on Erzerum should also be accepted with reservation.

⁴³ According to `Ata'i, Sun` Allah studied together with Jami at the feet of Khwaja Ahrar (Nev'izade `Ata'i, *Hada'iq al-haqa'iq*, p. 207). Jami, however, is usually said to have been initiated by Sa`d ad-Din Kashghari, who according to the *silsila* above was also Sun` Allah's teacher. *Silsilas* often contradict each other on the precise lines of affiliation during the first few generations after Baha' ad-Din. This is probably due to the fact that people studied often with more than one of the great masters.

⁴⁴ `Ata'i, *op. cit.*, p. 207-208; Kufrahi, *art. cit.*, p. 145.

considerable time there. Ibrahim Haqqi of Erzerum, born in 1703, relates in his *Ma`rifetname* how two of these Central Asians (Uzbeks) played a part in his father's spiritual quest. One of them, a wandering dervish, spent a full winter as the guest of Ibrahim Haqqi's father, 'Othman. The latter, hungry for mystical and esoteric teachings, had searched in vain for a *murshid-i kamil*, a perfect teacher, in his own environment, and was happy to entertain the traveller. It was another Uzbek, an itinerant preacher, a *murshid-i kamil* in his own right, who finally instructed 'Othman to travel south, where his *murshid* was said to be waiting for him. 'Othman then set out for Bitlis, where a renowned shaikh, Mulla Muhammad Arwasi, resided. The Arwasi are a well-known family of 'ulama and shaikhs, many of whom were to become prominent Naqshbandis in the 19th and 20th centuries. Mulla Muhammad is the earliest member of the family whom we find mentioned as a Sufi teacher. When 'Othman reached Bitlis in 1710, however, the shaikh had just died, so that he had to continue his quest. He finally found his *murshid-i kamil* in the person of Isma'il Faqir Allah at Tillo near Siirt. Faqir Allah was there the third successor of his great-grandfather Mulla 'Ali, who had been one of the leading 'ulama of Cizre before settling near Siirt. At a very early age, Ibrahim Haqqi joined his father at Tillo and also studied at the feet of the shaikh, whose successor he ultimately became.⁴⁵

None of the Naqshbandi shaikhs mentioned so far appear to have been Kurds themselves: Qocagha was probably an Adhari (or a Central Asian), Muhammad al-Ghaws a Central Asian, Sun` Allah an Adhari and Isma'il Faqir Allah of Arab descent. Muhammad Arwasi may have been the exception: although a sayyid, he may have been completely kurdised, as his later relatives were. It is worth observing that there were in fact several contemporary and even earlier influential Kurdish Naqshbandi shaikhs, who however received their initiations, and were themselves active, outside Kurdistan. This illustrates the really transnational character of the order, but it also reflects that fact that the social and political roles of a shaikh in a tribal society like Kurdistan can only be satisfactorily performed by outsiders, who are not by definition party to any tribal conflict.

The first of the "emigrant" Kurdish shaikhs was 'Ali Kurdi Maqtul, a Kurd from 'Amadiya who became a disciple of Khwaja Ahrar and settled as the latter's khalifa in

⁴⁵ Erzurumlu-Hasankaleli Ibrahim Hakki, *Marifetname* (modern Turkish edition), cild 2, Istanbul 1975, pp. 116-138. The calim, scientist and mystic Isma'il Faqir Allah is best known as a Qadiri shaikh. The biographical notes in the *Ma`rifetname* that are summarised here are, however, preceded by a lengthy exposé of the Naqshbandi path, which strongly suggests that the *murshid-i kamil* were also associated with this order.

Qazwin, where he was executed by the Safavids in 1519.⁴⁶ Another was Mahmud b. Abi Bakr al-Jazari, born in Cizre in 1636-7, who received his initiation into the Naqshbandiyya from Shaikh Muhammad Zaman as-Sindi in Quds (Jerusalem) and who settled in Damascus.⁴⁷ The most interesting and most influential of them however were a number of shaikhs from southern Kurdistan living and teaching in Medina. Ibrahim al-Kurani and his younger contemporary Muhammad b. `Abd ar-Rasul Barzinji, the best known of these, a considerable international influence. The latter is primarily known for his fierce condemnation of Ahmad Sirhindi's ideas, the former for his impact on Indonesian Sufism.⁴⁸ Both hailed from the district of Shahrazur, a rather special region of southern Kurdistan, and were initiated into the Naqshbandiyya, along with several other orders, in Medina, where they spent most of their lives.

RELIGIOUS PECULIARITIES OF SHAHRAZUR

Could it be that these Shahrazur scholars and mystics felt attracted to the particular brand of sufism they came to embrace - a strong dose of Ibn al-`Arabi and some Indian accents - because of their cultural backgrounds? Shahrazur had long been known to be a region whence various sects and occult traditions emerged. The *Ahl-i Haqq* sect or religion, with its Zoroastrian and (possibly) Isma`ili elements is only one of these. The region seems to have preserved beliefs and religious attitudes that have elsewhere disappeared. The popular religion contains many older Iranian elements, and even in this century we witness there the re-emergence of extreme heterodoxies within the ostensibly very orthodox Naqshbandi tradition.⁴⁹ The *Ahl-i Haqq* had in the past a much wider geographical distribution than now, especially among the Guran, to whom Ibrahim al-Kurani belonged. The `ulama of Shahrazur may well have long remained under the influence of Shihab ad-Din Suhrawardi's *Ishraqi* metaphysics; one of Suhrawardi's chief disciples was a Shams ad-Din Shahrazuri.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Khani. *op. cit.*, p. 172-173.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Khalil al-Muradi. *Silk ad-durar fi a`yan al-qarn ath-thani `ashar*, Bulaq, 1291, IV, pp. 126-127.

⁴⁸ S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. II, New Delhi 1983, pp. 338-340 ; A.H. Johns, "al-Kurani", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition); cf. J. Voll, "Muhammad Hayya al-Sindi and Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab: an analysis of an intellectual group in eighteenth-century Medina", *BSOAS* 38, 1975, pp. 32-39.

⁴⁹ For instance the *Haqq* sect founded by the Naqshbandi shaikh `Abd al-Karim of Sargalu. See: Bruinessen, *op. cit.*, p. 314, 341; M.R. Tawakkuli, *Tarikh-i tasawwuf dar Kurdistan*, Tehran, n.d., p. 233-234; Mustafa `Askari, *Bizâtnewe-y Haqa*, Baghdad, 1983.

⁵⁰ A.A. Adıvar, "İşrakîyun", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*.

The large and respected Barzinji family, sayyids who claim descent from the seventh imam, Musa Kazim, form a link between various sects and *tariqas* present in the area. A family tradition presents their first ancestor to settle here, Sayyid `Isa, as a son of `Ali Hamadani and a brother of Muhammad Nurbakhsh, while one of Sayyid `Isa's twelve sons was Sultan Sohak, the reputed founder of the *Ahl-i Haqq* religion.⁵¹ Until the 17th century, tradition says, the family adhered to the Nurbakhshiyya; Baba Rasul (d. 1646), from whom all present Barzinjis descend, changed to the `Alawiyya, a branch of the Khalwatiyya. The said Muhammad b. `Abd ar-Rasul was one of his sons; he was initiated into the Naqshbandiyya and several other *tariqas* in Medina. Most of the members of the family who remained in Shahrazur later became Qadiri, but the practices taught by them differ from those of the Qadiris elsewhere. They are an eclectic combination of elements from various *tariqas*, in which the ecstatic *dhikr*, loud drum rhythms and the self-inflicting of wounds, as with the Rifa'iyya, are most conspicuous. Significantly, their *silsila* contains not only the name of `Abd al-Qadir, but also those of Ahmad Rifa'i, Ahmad Badawi and Ibrahim Dasuqi. Later again, several Qadiri shaikhs belonging to this family became Naqshbandis, and one even a Christian.⁵²

It is not possible to know with any precision what the philosophical and metaphysical ideas were that found currency among the learned men of Shahrazur in the 16th and 17th centuries, but there was clearly an interest in and tolerance of ideas that were elsewhere condemned as heretical. Ibrahim al-Kurani's and Muhammad b. `Abd ar-Rasul Barzinji's spirited defence of Ibn al-`Arabi, and their studying and teaching several *tariqas* simultaneously may have conformed to common attitudes in their native region. And this may in turn have been one of the reasons why the Indonesians, coming from a culture with similar mystical traditions and tolerance, were attracted to al-Kurani.

At least one of these religious-mystical currents, the one represented by `Ali Hamadani and Muhammad Nurbakhsh, has been in evidence in northern Kurdistan as well. After his first unsuccessful attempt to establish himself as the *Mahdi* and his subsequent capture by Shahrukh, Nurbakhsh went to Iraq and settled in southern Kurdistan, where he was apparently recognised as the caliph and had money coined in his name — until he was taken prisoner

⁵¹ Edmonds, *op. cit.*, p. 68; Tawakkuli, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134. If we take these family relationships to be spiritual rather than biological the claims may well be correct. The persons concerned were near contemporaries, and Nurbakhsh was in fact a disciple of `Ali Hamadani's khalifa Ishaq al-Khutlani.

⁵² On this family see: Edmonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-76; Tawakkuli, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-157; Bruinessen, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-275, 341-345.

again by Shahrukh.⁵³ One of Nurbakhsh' khalifas was the Kurdish shaikh Husam ad-Din of Bitlis, who enjoyed an extraordinary respect throughout Kurdistan. It was largely due to Husam ad-Din's standing among the Kurdish amirs that his son, the famous diplomat and historian Idris Bitlisi, succeeded in rallying these amirs to the Ottoman cause against the Safavids, one of the few occasions where they overcame their perpetual rivalries and mutual suspicions.⁵⁴

It is not clear what the mystical teachings of Nurbakhsh and `Ali Hamadani were, nor whether much of them can be found back with later Kurdish mystics, but their names at least remained widely respected. `All Hamadani's collection of prayers and litanies, the *Awrad-i Fathiyya*, must have been in common use in the 17th century for, as mentioned before, the Urmawi shaikh "Açıqbash" Mahmud translated a commentary on these litanies and composed a sequel. Could Açıqbash also be responsible for the later popularity of these *Awrad* in Turkish Naqshbandi circles generally? In the early 19th century finally, Ibrahim Rushdi of Bitlis, the non-Khalidi Naqshbandi who was mentioned in the introduction to this article, devoted a large section of his *risala* to a eulogy of `Ali Hamadani.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

The presence of the Naqshbandiyya in Kurdistan can be attested from at least the beginning of the 17th century on, and it seems likely that there were small, isolated groups of Naqshbandis as early as the mid-16th century, due to the activities of the Adhari Shaikh Sun` Allah and itinerant central Asian Naqshbandis. No contacts could be discovered, in this early period, between the Naqshbandis of Kurdistan and the branches of the order established in and around Istanbul; their orientation appears to have been to the East only. None of the various branches in Kurdistan during the 17th and 18th century seems to have been long-lived; their origins remain obscure, and after one or two generations they disappear from our view again. The Naqshbandiyya did not evolve into a stable social and political institution as it did in 19th century Kurdistan. Moreover, almost none of the Naqshbandis of Kurdistan in

⁵³ D. S. Margoliouth, "Nurbakhshiyya", Encyclopaedia of Islam, first edition (following the biographical notices in Nur Allah Shustari's *Majalis al-mu'minin*).

⁵⁴ Brusali Mehmed Tahir, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 58; vol. III, p. 6-8. Idris Bitlisi's role in securing Kurdistan for the Ottoman sultan Selim I is extolled by all the standard histories.

⁵⁵ Ibrahim Rushdi Bitlisi, *Irshadi'r-Reşidin*, Hs. Or. Oct. 828. Staatsbibliothek, Berlin.

this period left any writings that could shed light on their actual doctrines; the exceptions being Ibrahim al-Kurani and his successors in Medina and Ibrahim Haqqi Erzerumi.

The only one of these Naqshbandis to have risen to political prominence was Shaikh `Aziz Mahmud, "*Rumiye şeyhi*", in Diyarbekir. Among the factors that favoured his emergence, the political circumstances of his time were essential. Central government control of the eastern provinces had considerably weakened in the course of the great social rebellions of the late 16th century (the Jalali rebellions), and even more so after the Ottoman defeat at the hands of the Safavids in the beginning of the 17th. The intermittent warfare between the two empires, from around 1575 to 1639, must have strengthened religious awareness and sentiment among the Sunni inhabitants of the buffer zone, mainly Kurds. As a refugee from territory conquered by the Safavids, the shaikh was a fit candidate for the position of a leader with whom these people could identify themselves. Significantly, he did not take up residence in one of the autonomous Kurdish principalities, where an undisputed, strong local political leadership existed, such as in Bitlis and Cizre, but in Diyarbekir, the major military and administrative centre of the Ottoman East. During the years of Ottoman confrontation with the Safavids, his growing political influence throughout Kurdistan was not only tolerated but even encouraged by the Ottoman administration, because it could serve the struggle against the Safavids. As soon as the Safavid threat had been neutralised by a peace treaty and a boundary agreement, the shaikh was no longer useful and his great influence an obstacle to the improvement of direct government control. His insistence on an alleviation of taxes, before the war was over, and his hold over the lower classes could be seen as indications that he had far-reaching political ambitions, so he was executed.

Accusations that the shaikh intended to set himself up as the *Mahdi* (of which the historians speak) may say more about the political atmosphere among the masses than about the shaikh's own plans. What little the contemporary sources betray about the social and political conditions among the lower strata of society indicates much discontent and unrest. Twenty five years after Shaikh Mahmud's execution, another shaikh did in fact proclaim himself the *Mahdi*, in `Amadiya, north of Mosul. Messianic expectations must have been widespread, for the *Mahdi* had in a short time a large following, and the rebellion could only be suppressed with much bloodshed.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Silahdar Fındıklı Muhammed Agha, *Silahdar Tarikhi*, I, Istanbul 1928, p. 434. It is not clear with which *tariqa* this Mahdi, named Shaikh Muhammad b. Sayyid `Abd Allah, was affiliated. More information is perhaps to be found in a letter by Ibrahim al-Kurani, the Kurdish mystic and scholar in Medina, in response to questions by a Sayyid Yasin b. Ahmad al-Husaini al-Khatib al-Jazari on what to think of the claims of this Mahdi: *Al-maslak al-*

qarib ila su'alat al-habib, (Ms. Berlin 2731). Brockelmann, who mentions this letter (GAL II, 386), relates that the Mahdi was a Kurdish boy of only twelve years at the time of his first uprising in 1075/1664, and that he found numerous followers. He was ultimately arrested by the wali of Mosul and sent to Istanbul, where he remained in captivity until his death.